The Hotel Clerk Looks Back at 1907

BY IRVIN S. COBB.

"It's been a long, foolish year, ain't it?" remarked the House Detective as his eye fell on the few remaining sheets that clung to the calendar in the cashier's office of the Hotel St. Reckless.

"It has that," said the Hotel Clerk. "But I don't look for any marked improvement in 1908. It'll be one day longer and therefore one day foolisher. Besides, it'll be leap year, and as an unmarried man, Larry, you should know what that means in perils and surprises for an unprotected male. Any moment during the next twelve months you're liable to be overpowered by a resolute and muscular member of the Lady Piano Movers' union, and dragged before an alderman or a clergyman or someone else that's qualified to forge the fetters on your trembling limbs. There'll be many a man married in haste next year that didn't intend to be married at all."

"Still, there's been some purty good sportin' events pulled off durin' 1907," mused the House Detective, again contemplating the depleted data stubs.

"Oh, if you mean sporting events, it's been a fine year," said the Hotel Clerk. "Let's see now, how many world marks were broken? In the long distance endurance events, Walter Wellman carried off all the stationary balloon records and the Washington team captured the gentleman's booby prize from the American League. Old Mr. Weston, the pedestrian, proved that if a trained athlete only keeps himself in rigorous training for forty consecutive years, he can get out and walk almost as far in ten hours as a suburban letter carrier has to walk in eight. The American heavyweight champion, Mr. Tommy Burns, nee Brusso, put out the English champion, Mr. Gunsby Moir, before a large number of true English sportlovers, who evidenced their appreciation of this notable hands-across-the-sea - and - thence - to - the - point - of the-jaw triumph by hissing the victor in their hearty English way for many minutes."

"Well, they had to give the pa'm to that lad, Burns, all right, all right," said the House Detective.

"If the police hadn't interfered they'd a-given him not only the palm but the black jack, the chair leg and the loaded cane," said the Hotel Clerk. "Any time you lick a British favorite you want to lure him away from home first, or his friends may move in on you in a body and reverse the verdict."

"I guess maybe it made 'em feel kinder sore to see their man trimmed up by an Irish-American boy," suggested the House Detective, with a tinge of racial pride.

"Yes, that's so, too," said the Hotel Clerk. "Except for the trifling fact that he happens to be a Frenchman from Canada, Mr. Burns is one of the hottest Irish-Americans you'll find anywhere around. Maybee if they'd only known where he came from the Englishmen might have hired him to stay awhile and do their fighting for them. They made a similar arrangement, you remember, with quite a lot of the Canadians during the Boer war."

"They chased Burns out of the ring, didn't they?" asked the House Detective.

"Not exactly," explained the Hotel Clerk, "but I think possibly 'twas because of certain impetuous advances on the part of the chivalrous audience that Mr. Burns omitted the pleasing custom of kissing his seconds, and the gentleman who held his towel for him after the referee had announced the decision, and fled for his life. It was a great pity, too, Larry—I'm inclined to think the Tommy Burns kiss would deserve to have gone sliding down the moistened corridors of Time along with the Sappho kiss, the James K. Hackett kiss, the Olga Nethersole kiss, the Kid Broad kiss, the Leopold of Belgium whiskers kiss and other notable kisses of history, art and drama.

"You know, Larry, kings and prize fighters are about the only prominent classes that kiss in public, any more. I could always understand about the kings—Alphonso of Spain has a lower jaw that's just built for catching a misplaced kiss that's gone adrift, and is about to drip down on somebody's white waistcoat and make a damp spot; the kaiser has gone to the trouble of furling his mustache back from his lips so when he kisses Edward of England it won't taste so much like an elderly toothbrush to his imperial uncle; and judging by the pictures I've seen of him, I should say Menelik of Abyssinia has an open-face kiss up his sleeve that would make an awful hit for Kyrlie Bellew or Faversham if they could only use it in a love scene without obliterating from half to two-thirds of the leading lady's make-up.

"As I say, I could understand about the kingly habit of kissing, but it took me some little time to dope it out on the prize fighter. 'Twas only lately that I happened on the reason: The pugilist is by nature sympathetic and emotional. There's something about the calling of altering other people's features without removing same from the face, that makes him sentimental. And except for Senator Tillman he's the strongest bulwark of race superiority we've got.

"A large husky coon fighter emerges from a hotel dining room in Baltimore or Louisville and issues a general defi. 'Is this here dinge a big, strong man?' inquires the holder of the belt. 'He is,' says the man who's bringing him the challenge, 'as strong as an ox.' 'Then I draw the color line,' says the people's idol. 'I stand for Caucasian supremacy in this as in all the learned professions. I will never meet this new black man save in the way of kindness.'

"I predict, Larry, that the Hon. Joe Gans will continue to have much trouble finding suitable white adversaries as long as he keeps his present excellent health.

"A successful pugilist erupts into tears as easily as into kisses, or maybe more so. He's what you might call temperamentally moist. We read in the papers:

"'In his dressing room the horrible Hun regained his senses. "Am I beaten?" were his first words. Those bending over him nodded assent. "Then I got the short end of the purse and lose the side bets," murmured the defeated gladiator, and burst into a fit of uncontrollable weeping.'

"It was a stirring account that the paper had of the touching scene up at Hammerstein's the other night, when old Fritz broke down and cried aloud. It must have been a moving spectable to see the tears rolling down those corrugated cheeks and splashing from freckle to freckle in pathetic cataracts. It occurred in the middle of the program.

"The four talented young gentlemen composing the Cora City Quartette having finished the sentimental farm ballad 'When My Honey Had the Hives,' remove their hands from each other's shoulders and retire, gracefully bowing, into the wings. Out comes dear Old Fritz, the spangled hero of three hundred grim battles, not counting the one he made once to get his diamond back. He started to address the spell-bound assemblage. But memories of past victories and several successful benefits rise up in him. His voice fills. The cascading tears begin to emit. The bright young man sitting in the box that has been provided for the sporting editors bury their several faces in their several handkerchiefs. Intense sobs are heard in the gallery. My young friend, Bagley, is removed in a fainting condition. My other young friend, Nagren, becomes acutely hysterical. 'Tis a damp, but epoch-making hour.

"Bagley, the lad that swooned on the memorable occasion which I have just described, is one of our leading hero-worshipers. I found him last Tuesday night standing in front of Rector's gazing in mute admiration upon the form of one of the latest aspirants for stellar honors in the realm of fiction.

"Look at him, yonder, at the table by the potted palm," says Bagley, catching me by the arm and speaking in low, reverent tones, 'watch him—he's eating his soup.'

"'Is he?' says I. 'He looks like he was baling out a boat.'

"'See him now,' says Bagley, eagerly, 'he's wiping his fork on his scalp. I tell you what,' says Bagley, 'he's one of nature's noblemen.'

"'He certainly is,' says I, 'and he's got an ear that puts me in mind of an English muffin. He's a grand piece of work,' I says, 'only he was hurriedly executed, and they didn't roll his linaments out very thin. His face is slightly coagulated in spots. Tell me,' I says to Bagley, 'what is that narrow white strip running across his skull from side to side, just above his eyebrows?'

"'That's his forehead,' says he.

"'Well,' I says, 'excuse me. I thought it was a scar in his hair.'

"'I'll introduce you to him when he gets through,' says Bagley. 'He won't mind it—he's quite democratic and simple in his manners.'

"'No,' I says. 'I appreciate the honor and all that, but I haven't got my evening clothes on.'

"'You'd enjoy knowing him,' says Bagley in the voice of one to whom a great boon has already been vouchsafed, 'he's a deep thinker.'

"'I'll bet you he is,' I says. 'I'll bet you he does such deep thinking that it's never visible on the surface.'

"And with that, Larry, I came away; I always did feel abashed in the presence of greatness, anyhow. But Bagley was right—the new champion is a great man; all our champions are great men as long as they last."

"Wot is it they call it?" asked the House Detective—"the manly art of self-defense?"

"Yes, that's what they called it in the times of Nonpareil, Jack Dempsey and old John L.," said the Hotel Clerk. "But I think I've got a better name for it these days."

"Wot's that?" asked the House Detective.

"The manly art of self-pretence," said the Hotel Clerk.

THE SCHEMES OF COLONEL CLAY

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quit the room he'll go down and tell them and before we know where we are that slippery eel will have wriggled through out fingers as he always wriggles. He is Paul Finglemore; he is Cesarine's young man, and unless we arrest him now, without one minute's delay, he'll be off to Madrid or St. Petersburg by this evening!"

"You are right," I answered, "it is now or never!"

"Dudley," Charles said, in his most authoritative voice, "stop here till we tell you you may leave the room. Amelia and Dolly, don't let that man stir from where he's standing. If he does, restrain him. Seymour and Dr. Beddersley, come down with me to the servants' hall. I suppose that's where I shall find this person, Dudley?"

"N—no, sir," Dudley stammered out, half beside himself with fright, "He's in the housekeeper's room, sir."

We went down to the lower regions in a solid phalanx of three. On the way we met Simpson, Sir Charles' valet, and also the butler, whom we pressed into the service. At the door of the housekeeper's room we paused, strategically. Voices came to us from within; one was Cesarine's, the other had a ring that reminded me at once of Madhurst and the seer, of Elihu Quackenboss and Algernon Coleyard. They were talking together in French, and now and then we caught the sound of stifled laughter.

We opened the door. "Est il drole, done, ce vieux?" the man's voice was saying.

"C'est a mourir de rire," Cesarine's voice responded.

We burst in upon them red handed. Cesarine's young man rose, with his hat in his hand, in a respectful attitude. It reminded me at once of Madhurst, as he stood talking his first day at Marvillier's to Charles, and of the little curate in his humblest moments as the disinterested pastor.

With a sign to me to do likewise, Charles laid his hand firmly on the young man's shoulder. I looked in the fellow's face; there could be no denying it; Cesarine's young man was Paul Finglemore, our broker's brother.

"Paul Finglemore," Charles said severely, "otherwise Cuthbert Clay. I arrest you on several charges of theft and conspiracy!"

The young man glanced round him. He was surprised and perturbed, but, even so, his inexhaustible coolness never once deserted him.

"What, five to one?" he said, counting us over. "Has law and order come down to this? Five respectable rascals to arrest one poor beggar of a chevalier d'industrie! Why, it's worse than New York. There, it was only you and me, you know, old Ten Per Cent!"

"Hold his hands, Simpson!" Charles cried, trembling lest his enemy should escape him.

Paul Finglemore drew back even while we held his shoulders.

"No, not yet, sir," he said to the man, haughtily. "Don't dare to lay your hands upon me! Send for a constable if you wish, Sir Charles Vandrift; but I decline to be taken into custody by a valet!"

"Go for a policeman," Dr. Beddersley said to Simpson, standing forward.

The prisoner eyed him up and down.

"Oh, Dr. Beddersley!" he said, relieved. It was evident he knew him. "If you've tracked me strictly in accordance with Bertillon's methods, I don't mind so much. I will not yield to fools; I yield to science. I didn't think this diamond king had sense enough to apply to you. He's the most gullible old ass I ever met in my life. But if it's you who have tracked me down, I can only submit to it."

Charles held to him with a fierce grip.

"Mind he doesn't break away, Sey," he cried. "He's playing his old game! Distrust the man's patter!"

"Take care," the prisoner put in. "Remember Dr. Polperro! On what charge do you arrest me?"

Charles was bubbling with indignation.

"You cheated me at Nice," he said; "at Meran; at New York; at Paris!"

Paul Finglemore shook his head.

"Won't do," he answered, calmly. "Be sure of your ground. Outside the jurisdiction. You can only do that on an extradition warrant."

"Well, then, at Seldon, in London, in this house, and elsewhere," Charles cried out excitedly. "Hold hard to him, Sey; by law or without it, blessed if he isn't going even now to wriggle away from us!"

At that moment Simpson returned with a convenient policeman, who he had happened to find loitering about near the area steps, and whom I half suspected from his furtive smile of being a particular acquaintance of the household.

Charles gave the man in charge formally. Paul Finglemore insisted that he should specify the nature of the particular accusation. To my great chagrin, Charles selected from his rogueries as best within the jurisdiction of the English courts, the matter of the payment for the castle of Lebenstein—made in London, and through a London banker.

"I have a warrant on that ground," he said. I trembled as he spoke. I felt at once that the episode of the commission, the exposure of which I dreaded so much, must now become public.

The policeman took the man in charge. Charles still held to him, grimly. As they were leaving the room the prisoner turned to Cesarine and muttered something rapidly under his breath in German.

"Of which tongue," he said, turning to us blandly, "in spite of my kind present of a dictionary and grammar, you still doubtless remain in your pristine ignorance."

Cesarine flung herself upon him with wild devotion.

"Oh, Paul, darling," she cried, in English, "I will not, I will not! I will never save myself at your expense. If they send you to prison—Paul, Paul, I will go with you!"

I remembered as she spoke what Mr. Algernon Coleyard had said to us at the senator's:

"Even the worst of rogues have always some good in them. I notice they often succeed to the end in retaining the affection and fidelity of women."

But the man, his hands still free, unwound her clasping arms with gentle fingers.

"My child," he answered, in a soft tone, "I am sorry to say the law of England will not permit you to go with me. If it did (his voice was as the voice of the poet we had met), 'stone walls would not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage.'" And bending forward, he kissed her forehead tenderly.

We led him out of the door. The policeman, in obedience to Charles' orders, held him tight with his hand, but steadily refused, as the prisoner was not violent, to handcuff him. We hailed a passing hansom.

"To Bow street!" Charles cried, unceremoniously pushing in policeman and prisoner. The driver nodded. We called a four-wheeler ourselves, in which my brother-in-law, Dr. Beddersley, and myself took our seats. "Follow the hansom!" Charles cried out. "Don't let him out of your sight. After him, close, to Bow street!"

I looked back and saw Cesarine, half fainting, on the front doorsteps, while Dolly, bathed in tears, stood supporting the lady's maid, and trying to comfort her. It was clear she had not anticipated this end to the adventure.

"Goodness gracious!" Charles screamed out, in a fresh fever of alarm, as we turned the first corner; "where's that hansom gone to? How do I know the fellow was a policeman at all? We should have taken the man in here. We ought never to have let him get out of our sight. For all we can tell to the contrary, the constable himself may only be one of Colonel Clay's confederates!"

And we drove in trepidation all the way to Bow street.

AN ENGROSSING PROBLEM.

(Cleveland Plain Dealer.)

"Your little boy seems very quiet. He's fond of arithmetic, isn't he? I notice that he's counting on his fingers."

"Yes. He spends most of his time counting the days to Christmas."